

The Artist & The Dancer by JavaCat26

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: All Aboard, Alternate Universe - College/University, Angst, El is a beautiful dancer, F/M, Fluff, Had to write this one down, Hold onto your smut hats, Mike is an artist, Mileven, SMUT IS HERE, future smut, just for fun, smut train

Language: English

Characters: Eleven (Stranger Things), Mike Wheeler, Will Byers

Relationships: Eleven & Mike Wheeler, Eleven/Mike Wheeler

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2017-03-11

Updated: 2018-01-07

Packaged: 2022-04-03 15:16:09

Rating: Mature

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 6

Words: 16,883

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Mike's stomach tightened with nerves. His fingers trembled. There was a tingling in his crotch that wouldn't go away. The model's lips twisted into a tantalizing smirk...She knew the affect she had on him. Worse, she was enjoying this, his agony!

Her warm honey-brown eyes were fixated on him. Emotion washed over him like warm bath water. He wouldn't let her down. Ever. He took a deep breath, steadied his hand, and pressed his pencil to the canvas. "I can do this..."

1. Chapter One

Author's Note:

Hello again!

If angst and drama isn't your thing, this one could be for you. Sexy Mileven College AU. It popped into my head and I couldn't resist writing this down. Comments are appreciated! Thanks for reading!

Mike Wheeler was late for art class again. He ran as fast as he could across the campus of New York University. His messenger bag bounced against his hips as he dashed through a crowd of photography students who were setting up tripods on the lawn.

“Sorry! Excuse me! Coming through!” They huffed in annoyance as Mike broke up their little photo group.

He finally reached the tall, brick building that housed the art classes on campus. The art students nicknamed it “The Tower,” due to its medieval-looking towers and stained glass windows. Mike pulled open the heavy wooden door and flew down the hallway to room 113. He checked his watch and felt rather smug about the time.

Heh. Only five minutes late.

“Michael Wheeler,” his professor said as he stumbled into room 113. “So glad you could join us. Please take your seat next to Mr. Byers and we can begin.”

“Sorry, Mr. Moss.”

Out of breath, Mike made his way to where his friend was sitting in the back corner of the room. Will gave a weak wave and a small smile. The other students had already set up their canvases and materials. They rolled their eyes as Mike shoved his way between desks. He was almost always late to class.

“Wow Mike,” Will teased. “Late again? Who would have thought?”

“I know, I know.” Mike sat down and quickly pulled out his art supplies. He dug into his bag for a charcoal pencil and began to sharpen its point. “It’s impossible to get over here in time from the business school across campus. Remember, I’m taking this class as a favor to you so be grateful I’m even here.”

“Hey, don’t blame me,” Will said innocently. “Your business degree requires an art credit, so there you go.”

In the beginning of the school year, Mike was reluctant to take an art course but he found he actually quite enjoyed it. And he had even learned a lot – how to create depth, how to use color to convey emotion, and how to use different mediums to create different effects on a canvas.

Mr. Moss clapped his hands in the front of the room, regaining the attention of the class. “Alright people, we have a special treat for you today. We have some volunteers who are willing to model for us. This will help you to learn how to create an anatomically correct human form. Feel free to use your own personal style on this work as

the models will vary in age, shape, and size.”

The professor picked up a small basket from his desk and began to pass it out to the students. “Everyone take a piece of paper from this basket and split up into pairs. The number you draw from the basket will correspond to the model you’ll be drawing today. We started doing this when students started fighting over the so-called ‘conventionally pretty’ models. There are just enough models for each group to have one. You get who you get, no trades. And remember to maintain the art standards that NYU enforces on a daily basis. That is, treat this as a *professional* learning opportunity. Okay everyone, find your partners for this activity.”

“Wanna be my partner, partner?” Will asked jokingly. Mike smiled. They were always partners in class.

One by one, the students picked out the slips of paper from the basket. Mike eyed the basket as it went around the room.

“What if we get some old hairy fat guy?” Mike joked. “Or some old lady?”

“He did say the models will vary in age,” Will said seriously. “I bet the only people with enough self-confidence to model nude are old people anyway.” He giggled at the grossed out look Mike had on his face.

The basket finally came to the two friends and only had one slip of paper left. Mike picked it up and read it.

“Number Eleven?” He wondered who that was.

Mr. Moss took the empty basket away and set it back on his desk. “Alright, does every group have a number? Good. Models, come in please!” A door on the other side of the room opened and several people walked in, wearing numbered silk robes. Mike craned his head, looking for Number Eleven.

Indeed, there were several elderly volunteers. Some groups hid their disappointment at being stuck with the old models.

“Forty-two...Twenty-nine...Eighteen...Five...” Mike counted the models he saw, feeling more and more nervous. “Where is Eleven!?”

Will pointed to the last model who walked in slowly, clutching her silk robe. “There she is!”

Mike’s eyes focused on Number Eleven. He was speechless.

Shoulder-length brown hair twirled softly as she looked around the room. Her movements were so graceful, as if she was floating in the air. The exposed peachy skin on her neck promised a creamy complexion hid underneath the robe. A small button nose and rose lips adorned her delicate face. Her big brown eyes met Mike’s eyes from across the room.

“Call her over,” Will whispered to his clearly awestruck friend.

“El-El-eleven,” Mike croaked, his throat suddenly bone-dry. “Eleven?”

She heard her number and walked over to the two friends, causing jealous stares in their direction from the other art students who were clearly wishing they had drawn a different number.

“Dude, wanna trade?” A shaggy-haired kid leaned over and whispered to Mike.

“Fuck you, James. No trades!” Mike hissed, feeling a surge of protectiveness over a woman he hadn’t even met properly yet.

She now stood in front of them and Mike released a breath he wasn’t aware he had been holding.

“H-Hi, Number El-Eleven,” he stammered, hopelessly fixated on the model in front of him like a deer in headlights.

“Alright everyone, get working!” Mr. Moss called to the class. “You have the rest of the class hour to create your art piece.”

Silently, Number Eleven let the robe fall slowly to the floor and Mike felt like he had been hit with a ton of bricks.

...*Holy fuck...*

He drank in the sight of her exquisite curves, the perky bare breasts, the long legs... His head was swimming like he was drunk. Mike tried to hide the fact that his jeans now seemed unusually tight. His eyes became dry as he refused to close his eyelids, for fear that she would vanish in front of him.

...*Wow...*

Will cleared his throat and politely tried not to stare at the poor girl, who his friend was eyeing hungrily. "Alright, let's get started. Would you mind moving just a tad to the left?"

The model shifted slightly, to where the light hit her form the best.

"Perfect," said Will, as he began to sketch an outline on his canvas.

Mike seemed to snap out of his trance and remembered that he actually had to complete the assignment, instead of just staring at this otherworldly woman in front of him. His eyes traced the delicate dimples on her milky skin, her slender thighs...

She's already a fucking masterpiece...How am I supposed to do her justice?

Mike's stomach tightened with nerves. His fingers trembled. There was a tingling in his crotch that wouldn't go away. The model's lips

twisted into a tantalizing smirk...She knew the affect she had on him. Worse, she was enjoying this, his agony!

Her warm honey-brown eyes were fixated on him. Emotion washed over him like warm bath water. He wouldn't let her down. Ever. He took a deep breath, steadied his hand, and pressed his pencil to the canvas. "I can do this..."

Mike began to sketch the beautiful woman's body – he began with a loose outline of her form, as he was taught in class. Glancing up at the model as often as he could without giving off a creep vibe, he slowly added more detail...her head...her legs...her hair...her face...

He wanted to concentrate on her face, her most expressive feature. He drew two almond-shaped eyes, a small nose, pouty lips, round cheeks... He looked back to admire his work. Mike was disappointed; something was missing from his drawing. It seemed too...superficial.

Mike looked deeper. In his artwork, he tried to capture not only how the models looked, but who they were. Obviously, this model was extremely attractive. But there was something else reflected in her eyes, a certain distant sadness that was hauntingly beautiful. She was surrounded by mystery, shrouded in secrets. Mike's head spun with the intensity of seeing into the very depths of her soul.

The model's eyes continued to bore into his. They seemed to speak to him with a gentle vulnerability.

"Don't hurt me."

Mike shivered, chills running along his spine. Never before had he experienced such emotion, such intensity, such –

"Okay everyone, time's up!"

"What?!" Mike thought, dumbfounded. "That's it?!" Mike couldn't believe how fast the hour went. He stupidly looked down at his canvas. Those familiar beautiful eyes stared back at him. He sketched the delicate features of her face with so much detail!

Mr. Moss stood in front of the room with his hands folded. "Models, thank you so much for volunteering. We are grateful you could be here."

The art students clapped to show their appreciation. Model Number Eleven stood up and donned her silk robe, silently slinking out of the room without so much as a backwards glance in his direction. Mike watched her leave the room, as if he was waking up from a beautiful dream. He looked over at Will's easel.

He had drawn the model standing straight and tall, looking triumphant with a superhero cape billowing behind her. The number "011" was written on her chest. She was vanquishing an evil villain with her arm outstretched, using what appeared to be telekinetic powers. She looked like a sketch right out of a comic book.

"What do you think?" Will asked, shyly. "Mr. Moss said we could give it our own personal style..."

Mike smiled and clapped a hand on Will's shoulder. Both boys had always been a big fan of comic books. "I love it!"

Will beamed happily and began to pack up his art supplies, shoving Superhero Number Eleven into his black canvas bag. The other art students were packing up too; some had already cleared out of the classroom. A few stragglers remained behind to chat with the professor.

"Come on, Mike!" Will called, heading towards the door. "We're supposed to meet Dustin and Lucas for lunch in the dining hall."

"Coming!" Mike began to pack up his supplies, still in a daze. He rubbed his thumb gently along the jaw line of the drawing that was still set up in front of him. He could almost hear her gentle moan echoing through his mind.

I have to find her. I need to see her again.

2. Ch. 2

Summary for the Chapter:

Softly padding over to the two boys, the girl clutched the robe to her chest. Her heart began to race. Doubt curdled in her stomach. Could she really do this?

His chocolate brown eyes reassured her.

After a deep breath and a surge of newfound bravery, she let the robe fall to the floor. A rush of cold air caressed her skin.

As he looked down at his overly-greasy slice of pepperoni pizza, Mike realized he was too distracted to be hungry. He couldn't stop thinking about the beautiful girl from art class.

Much to his chagrin, his friends noticed his lack of appetite.

"Hey Mike," Dustin said, midway through a bite of his own double cheeseburger. He pointed to Mike's lonely slice of pizza, cooling slowly on the plate. "Are you going to eat that?"

Lucas rolled his eyes. "Yes, he's going to eat it. Why else would he pay for it?"

"Well, he's not eating it!" Dustin shot back, as though Mike were committing a heinous crime.

"I think he's a bit distracted right now," said Will matter-of-factly. "Our art class was rather interesting, to say the least."

"Guys, I'm right here. I can hear you talking about me!" Mike said hotly, slamming down his fists on the table.

His three friends sat with their mouths gaped open in astonishment at Mike's outburst. Then, a few giggles emerged among them.

"A little touchy, eh Mikey boy?" Lucas asked. "What really happened in that art class?"

"Nothing!" Mike lied. "Nothing happened! Not a single thing. So just drop it."

"He's getting defensive now," Dustin pointed out. "What do you think that could mean?"

"Oh, he's just upset because he didn't have the guts to ask a beautiful girl for her number," said Will, bringing the problem to light.

"Is that right?" Asked Lucas, attempting and failing to stifle an amused smirk. "Well, that *is* interesting."

"Is she pretty, Mike?" Dustin asked. "Is she another student in class?"

Mike's cheeks flushed with embarrassment. Why did Will have to bring this up? He crossed his arms. "I don't want to talk about it."

"Why not?" Dustin whined. "We never get any juicy girl stories. The last story we got was when Lucas went on a horrible date with that girl from the library – "

"Which we *won't* be talking about," Lucas interrupted. "Mike, what's the deal, man? Why didn't you get her number?"

"I bet he was too scared," said Dustin. "You know how he gets when he's nervous. He starts stuttering."

"And his face turns red."

"And he looks down at his feet."

"And he starts fiddling with his hands." Dustin and Lucas howled with laughter.

"Enough!" Mike yelled, gaining the attention of other students who were eating near them. He glared daggers at the two boys. "Why can't you two morons just let this go? Why do you have to make fun of me for something I can't even control?!"

"Mike," Will said soothingly, attempting to calm the tension. "It's okay. We'll figure out who she was. I can try to help you and talk to Mr. Moss for you. Maybe he knows how to contact her."

“Wait, you don’t even know who she was?” Lucas was confused. “How is that possible?”

“She was just a nude model who came to class for one day,” Will explained.

“A *nude* model?” Dustin’s eyes seemed to bulge out of his head. “Why didn’t I take an art class?!”

“Shut up, Dustin! You’re a pervert!”

Lucas held his chin between his thumb and forefinger. This was something he did whenever he was thinking and trying to work out a problem in his head. “So, if this girl came into your art class, then your art teacher must know who she is.”

“Exactly,” said Will. “Like I said, we can ask Mr. Moss about her. How does that sound, Mike?”

“Yeah, we can track her down for you!” Dustin exclaimed.

Mike sighed deeply. He rubbed his eyes. Of course his friends would try to help. But what if this girl had a boyfriend? Worse, what if she wanted nothing to do with him? He would end up looking like a creepy stalker after all of this was said and done.

“But, what if she – ” Mike started, but it was Will’s turn to interrupt.

“Mike, I could feel the sparks between you two. You have nothing to worry about.”

Mike still looked unsure.

“Trust me,” Will added.

Mike nodded and smiled. He would always trust Will.

“Absolutely not, Mr. Wheeler.”

“But Mr. Moss, I want to finish my drawing!”

The art teacher scoffed. “Oh, I am well aware of what you want.” He shook his head.

“But sir, you don’t understand,” said Will. “Mike needs to contact her because he – ”

“I’m going to stop you right there, Mr. Byers,” said Mr. Moss, holding up a hand to silence the boy. “As I’ve told you both, we protect our models’ privacy. I cannot give out the name nor the contact information of any of our models due to confidentiality reasons. That is the school’s policy and I have to enforce it. We have had incidents in the past.”

Mike’s shoulders sank. He would never find her.

“I’m sorry, Mr. Wheeler. On a different note, I am looking forward to seeing both of your projects. Your skills have come a long way since we started the semester.”

As the two left Mr. Moss’ office, silence settled between them. Will felt awful that he had gotten his friend’s hopes up, only for them to be smashed down by a bullshit school policy.

“We’ll find her Mike,” he said, eager to cheer up his friend. “She must be a student here. Maybe we’ll see her around somewhere.”

“Whatever,” Mike said numbly. “I won’t count on it. I’m going back to my dorm. See you later.”

Will watched as his friend walked slowly down the hall. Mike was usually so cheerful and lively. Now, he was dismal and glum. The weight of the world seemed to be pressing down on him.

Mike crossed the campus in what seemed like mere seconds. His body was on autopilot and he couldn’t remember climbing the stairs up to his dorm room, yet here he was.

He set his bag on his desk and began to unpack its contents. He would wait until later to do his homework. Right now, he felt so drained and his eyes were becoming heavy. He needed a nap.

He took out the drawing of the beautiful, mysterious girl and set it against the wall next to his bed so he could look at it while lying down. He would probably never see her again. But he could dream, couldn't he?

He closed his eyes and remembered her...

Softly padding over to the two boys, the girl clutched the robe to her chest. Her heart began to race. Doubt curdled in her stomach. Could she really do this?

His chocolate brown eyes reassured her.

After a deep breath and a surge of newfound bravery, she let the robe fall to the floor. A rush of cold air caressed her skin.

His eyes were on her – naked and vulnerable. A blush was creeping up his neck and spreading to his cheeks. She smirked. How cute. He's shy! This made her feel...erotic? Was that the right word? She had never felt it before. Desire?

For him.

"Jane!" A voice shattered her thoughts and brought her back to reality. All of the other girls in her dance class were looking at her. Some were giggling.

"Y-Yes, Mrs. Marzoni?" She asked shyly, her cheeks burning with embarrassment.

"Do you plan to follow along with the rest of the class?" Mrs. Marzoni asked impatiently, crossing her arms. "Our annual Spring Recital is too important to waste on daydreams."

"Sorry ma'am," the girl mumbled. She straightened up her back, put her feet into position, and focused on the dance class exercises.

Her thoughts had gotten the best of her again, just as her father always said they did. She mentally scolded herself for letting it happen. She shouldn't think about that boy. He was what her father would call a 'distraction.'

But the boy had seemed so warm and inviting...he made it easy to get lost in her thoughts. She smiled, remembering the delicate freckles on the boy's cheeks. Just as he was concentrating on her features, she was also memorizing him.

She had never modeled before and wasn't sure if she would do it again. She only did it for the money – her costume for the Spring Recital was very expensive. Financial aid wouldn't cover it; it had to be an out of pocket expense. Overwhelmed by desperation, she signed up to be a model for an art class - \$20 per class session. It wasn't much, but every little bit would help. If they liked her as a model, maybe they would invite her back for more class sessions.

A single word floated through her mind, an echo of her past...

Forbidden.

And it was. At least, her father had raised her that way. Now that she was on her own, she could make her own choices. She could be independent.

The boy slowly drifted back into her thoughts. She remembered the way his eyes seemed to bore through her, as if he could see right through her body. Yes, erotic was definitely the right word.

She let that feeling flush through her body as she kept her toes pointed and her leg outstretched. She smiled gently to herself. It was nice to have a happy memory. But then, she remembered how she felt afterwards – after the class was over, after the boy had finished his drawing...

She remembered how she grabbed her robe and hastily made her way out of the room, her face flushed with embarrassment.

He must think less of me for modeling naked, as though I'm nothing more than a piece of meat.

And no guy wants sloppy seconds, do they? Right Papa?

Notes for the Chapter:

I sincerely apologize for making you all wait so long

between chapters. I just bought a house (my first!) so all of my spare time has had to be dedicated to lawyers and banks and craziness. But! We just moved in last weekend so now I will have more time to spend on writing. Chapters will come much sooner from now on.

Thank you all for reading! All of your comments really make my day!

3. Chapter 3

Summary for the Chapter:

A little bit of angst, a little bit of hope for our kids.

Notes for the Chapter:

Well, it's been a while and I sincerely apologize! I really hope you all enjoy this chapter. It was such fun to write.

Thank you SO MUCH to everyone who has left comments on this story! You all give me the motivation I need to continue writing <3

The days slowly returned to normal for Mike, save for his unhelpful friends' occasional jokes about the 'mysterious model' from last week. He tried to shove the girl from his mind and focus on school, his numerous class assignments, anything (hell, Spring Break was coming up!) but the memory of *her* always returned, gently floating into his mind as soft as a butterfly's wings.

Her lips. Her curves.

Her eyes...

Two golden brown irises that bore into him as if to silently scream their life story. Mike was haunted by those eyes.

Who the hell was this girl? Was she a student at NYU? And how could she have captured Mike's heart without ever saying a word? The better question was, in Mike's opinion, why was he completely enamored with a girl he would probably never see again?

Dustin and Lucas tried to convince him otherwise.

Loudly.

In the library.

During midterms.

The boys sat at their own table in the massive, ancient library. Dusty old books covered the vast rows of bookshelves. The large room was filled with students silently completing assignments and hurriedly typing away on keyboards. Today marked the start of Midterm Week. The students could hardly believe that midterms were already upon them (Dustin *swore* the semester had just started!) and a sense of dread hung over the room like a dark cloud.

Will sat next to Mike on one side of the table. He was putting the finishing touches on his art class drawing of the ‘mysterious model.’ Her outline was darkened with ink and now he was adding dashes of color to the drawing. Mike was distracted from his Business Ethics assignment, stealing glances of the drawing almost every minute. Even though it was just art, it felt to him as though she were sitting here in this room. His neck tingled continuously. Her presence wouldn’t leave him alone!

Dustin looked up from his Biology textbook and broke the silence among the small group of boys. “So Mike. I’ve been thinking. We should try to find the mysterious model.”

Without looking up from his textbook (okay, he was actually still looking at Will’s drawing), Mike shook his head. “I don’t think so.”

Dustin didn’t give up. “Come on! Spring Break starts next week so this week could be our only shot. Let’s organize a massive search for her. She’s gonna think it’s romantic!”

“Or she’ll think it’s creepy,” Will chimed in.

“Don’t ever take romance advice from *Dustin*,” Lucas warned, rolling his eyes. He put his open book face down on the table. His voice suddenly turned serious, as if they were discussing a secret military operation. “Here’s what we’ll do. We stakeout the campus at four different locations. We each get a walkie talkie and –”

“Oh my god,” Mike moaned in annoyance. “Will everyone *please* shut up about this?!”

He had spoken a little louder than he intended, earning them dirty looks from the surrounding students and a sharp “SHHH” from the librarian.

“Don’t you want to find this girl?” Dustin asked, confused.

“Yeah, Mike. You’ve acted like a lovesick puppy ever since you met her.” Lucas crossed his arms. “Do you want to find her or not?”

Mike scoffed, closing his textbook. “What am I supposed to do? Post my nude drawing of her like it’s some kind of missing person’s poster?! I don’t want to look like a damn stalker. So everyone just drop it!”

The boys fell silent. Dustin sheepishly traced the diagram of a reptile with his finger.

Mike stood up and shoved his books in his backpack. He couldn’t do this right now. “I’m leaving. See you losers later.”

He slung his backpack around his shoulder and headed out the door of the library. The crisp air chilled his skin. Wind whipped against his face, making his eyes tear. The tips of his fingers started to feel numb. March weather in New York was no joke. Finally, he reached his dorm.

Climbing the stairs to his dorm room, Dustin’s words echoed through Mike’s head.

‘Don’t you want to find this girl?’

Good question – what exactly did he want?

He collapsed on his bed with a tired sigh. Maybe he should try to figure that out. Yes, he thought about her. Yes, he wanted her. But how would that ever happen?

Suddenly, Mike heard a soft knock at the door. He looked up from his bed to see Will’s face peeking behind the door.

“Hey can I come in?” Will asked shyly.

“Sure,” Mike sighed, plopping his head back down on his pillow.

Will walked into the room and sat in Mike’s desk chair. His hands fumbled nervously. “Mike, is everything okay?”

“I guess.”

“You seem upset.”

Silence.

“Is it about that girl from art class?”

More silence.

“Mike, seriously, it’s okay – ”

“No! It’s not okay!” Mike sat up on the bed and flailed his arms wildly. “Everyone is making fun of me and I can’t stand it!”

“Oh come on. You know you can’t take Dustin and Lucas too literally. They’re just trying to help.”

“But it’s annoying.”

“Well, so are they sometimes.” Will smirked.

Mike cracked a weak smile. He laid his head back down and stared at the ceiling. “I just...I don’t know what to do.”

“About what?”

“About *her*.”

Will spun around in the desk chair and looked thoughtful, as if considering the options. “Well, what do you *want* to do?”

Mike scoffed. “I’ve been trying to figure that out. That’s a tough question.”

“No it isn’t,” Will insisted. “Seriously, it isn’t. What do you want?”

Mike’s heart clenched. “I want her. I want to find her.”

“Right. And?”

“But, how the hell am I supposed to do that? Mr. Moss wouldn’t help. I don’t even know her damn *name*.”

Will sat patiently and listened to his friend.

“And even if I did find her, then what? She’ll think I’m some obsessive weirdo creep. What if she won’t...what if she doesn’t want anything to do with me?”

Will knew Mike’s heart was on the line. He was afraid of rejection, which was completely understandable. But some things are bigger than fear. “If that happens, then at least you’ll know. And you’ll be able to stop plaguing yourself over it.”

Mike considered that. Leave it to Will to finally talk some sense into him and get him grounded in reality. He took out his drawing of her. Those eyes stared back at him expectantly.

‘Will you come find me?’

Yes, Mike thought, suddenly feeling more determined than ever. She was worth any potential amount of hurt. *I will find you.*

The eyes continued to stare back at him. *‘Promise?’*

I promise.

Mike stood up from his bed. “I’m ready. Let’s do it.”

Will jumped up, smiling. “That’s the spirit!”

Mike started hastily shoving random art supplies into his backpack. He grabbed the drawing and slung his backpack over his shoulder. “I have an idea, but we’ll have to act fast. We’ll need Dustin and Lucas to help. Let’s go.”

“Mike, what the hell are we all doing here when it’s pitch black? And why did you want me to haul this shit here? I had to steal this from the maintenance closet in the basement of the dorm. Spray paint, flashlights, a ladder, walkie talkies...”

“Weren’t walkie talkies *your* idea?!”

“Guys, I don’t think this is a good idea – ”

“Shut up, Dustin!”

“Seriously, I could lose my scholarship.”

“We could probably all be expelled for this.”

“That’s not funny, Will!”

“I never said it was.”

“It isn’t too late to back out. I always knew you were a *chicken*.”

“Screw you, Lucas!”

“Everyone shut up!” Mike grabbed a spray paint can and climbed the ladder, flashlight in hand. “Alright, we only have a couple hours. Now, everyone take a walkie talkie and stand guard. Let me know if anyone is coming.”

The days also passed for Jane. She sank herself into her dance classes. The spring recital was just five days away and Mrs. Marzoni was working the dance students to the bone to hone their skills. Their form, movements, and timing had to be flawless.

And Jane was under the most pressure – Mrs. Marzoni had given her a solo dance! She was able to create her own choreography, as long as it was up to par with her teacher’s incredibly high expectations. Jane worked with her teacher for hours every night after her classes

ended.

It was the perfect distraction to keep her mind occupied, or else her mind might wander to a certain shy, adorable art student...

His shyness. His freckles.

The way his hands traced her form with such determination...

“Jane!”

Her mind snapped back to the present. Dance solo practice. An annoyed Mrs. Marzoni huffed.

“You need to concentrate harder. I can tell you are distracted. Again. I am starting to get disappointed.”

Jane flinched. She hated being the source of anyone’s disappointment. “I’m sorry, ma’am. I’m just...tired.”

She wasn’t lying. Her legs were sore. Her back ached. The muscles in her body screamed at her from being overworked.

Her teacher nodded. “I understand that this can be stressful. If you can’t handle it, then I can assign your solo to another dancer – ”

“No!” Jane pleaded, her heart sinking. “This is my dream. I’m sorry. I’ll focus. I won’t disappoint you again.”

“Okay, then show me the choreography you added since our last session. Take it from the top.”

Jane obeyed. She put her feet into position and Mrs. Marzoni started the music.

Her dance started slowly, matching the slow rhythm of the music. She stretched her arms out delicately, rising to the balls of her feet. She spun her body around gently, keeping her arms outstretched. She pointed her toes and leapt in the air.

Gradually, she danced around the room until the music stopped. She looked at Mrs. Marzoni expectantly, wondering what criticism the

woman would have for her newly added choreography.

Mrs. Marzoni grabbed her chin in thought for a moment before she spoke. “Your movements are beautiful. Your posture is nice and straight.”

Jane offered her the tiniest smile, feeling hopeful.

“But,” the woman continued, “you’re stiff.”

Jane was confused. *Stiff?* “What do you mean?”

“It needs more...” the woman twirled her hand, searching for the correct word. Suddenly, she snapped her fingers. “Emotion. More *feeling*.”

“How? How do I do that?”

“Dig deeper. What do you feel? You can’t tell the audience how you feel with your words. You have to do it with your body, with your movements. Dancing is simply poetry in motion.”

“Poetry?”

“Good dancers move in rhythm to the music. But *great* dancers use their emotions to tell a story to connect with the audience on a deeper level. Tell the audience *your* story.”

“Tell the audience my story,” Jane repeated, trying to get used to the idea of sharing her personal information.

“Exactly. Just ask yourself – what do you feel? Think about that for our session tomorrow. That will be all for tonight.”

Jane packed her things and headed out of the dance studio, feeling exhausted. Drained.

But what *else* did she feel? Jane had to look deep inside herself to answer that question. There had been a lot going on in her head lately. A certain brown-eyed boy who collided with everything she had been taught.

She shivered, feeling chills run up her spine. It didn't come from the cool night air. She heard *his* cruel voice in her head. He would never leave her alone, even when he was so far away.

'Have you been corrupted by this boy?'

No, Papa.

'I am very disappointed in you, Jane.'

She closed her eyes and swallowed the urge to burst into tears. A lump in her throat hardened.

Crying is failure. Emotion is weakness.

That was her story. Failure. Weakness. Disappointment.

She floated across campus like a ghost, her legs working on autopilot. She had been practicing with Mrs. Marzoni for hours and now the sun had long since set from the sky. The moon shone brightly in the night sky – a candle to light her way through a sea of inky blackness.

Hunger gnawed at her stomach. Had she eaten anything all day? Since it was Midterm week, the dining hall was open all night. Her legs carried her there.

She saw the bright entrance of the dining hall in the distance, already smelling food. As she came closer to the large brick building, the smells grew stronger. Until –

Wait, what the hell is that?

On the side of the building, barely visible in the darkness, something on the wall was...catching the light from the dining hall. Was that paint? She left the fluorescent lighting of the dining hall entrance and made her way to the side of the building, using her cell phone as a flashlight.

She shined the light against the brick and gently touched the rough surface. It smelled like spray paint. That was used as a dark outline (for what, she didn't know) and it was still wet. But there were other types of paint used too – what was probably acrylic paint and even

oil pastels.

Someone made a huge mural on this brick wall! That's so impressive. But, what is it of?

She was too close to see the entire mural. Stepping back, she realized it wasn't just a mural. It was a portrait. Of a girl that looked like...

Oh my god, it's me!

Was this...? Did *he*...?

Her own eyes stared back at her, as if she were looking into a mirror. That was her answer.

He did this! Her heart skipped a beat.

Her eyes took in the portrait, trying to absorb every detail possible. Black outline of her face, delicate smears of a creamy color for her round cheeks, strokes of rose-red for her pouty lips, brown for her eyes with what looked like golden flakes to give detail and dimension to her irises...

It was titled "Eleven."

Her mouth fell open in awe. The amount of detail used for this portrait was astounding! And he had only met her once, very briefly. But why would he do this? Did this mean... that he thought about her as much as she thought about him?

Tears threatened to fall and were blurring her vision. She wiped them away and let her eyes wander downwards, to the bottom of the portrait where something was written:

"By Mike Wheeler," she read aloud.

Mike Wheeler. She tasted the name on her tongue. Her head felt like it was spinning. She was soaring with happiness.

Mike Wheeler...

Mike Wheeler...

Mike...

She giggled, feeling drunk. He was reaching out to her. She had to reach back out to him. Giddy emotion bubbled inside her stomach. She would tell him her story.

Notes for the Chapter:

Soooo, my original outline for this chapter had such a different ending. But, things somehow ended up here. And I love it, lol.

4. Chapter 4

Summary for the Chapter:

His body was on autopilot; she was reeling him in. He was floating. Like a feather caught in the wind. Powerless.

Notes for the Chapter:

Guys, this chapter was such a BEAST! I had a blast writing it but oh my god...it was pure craziness. I put the days of the week to clarify the timeline of what's going on. I hope it doesn't disappoint! I hope you like long chapters!

A big thank you to everyone who commented on this story! I'm so glad you are enjoying this. I hope this chapter lives up to your expectations! Let me know what you think!

Monday

I want him to see me dance, Jane realized. This recital would be an important experience in her dancing career and she wanted to share it with him. If the mural's purpose really was to call out to her, she had to answer back. But *how* could she answer him if she didn't know where to find him?

An idea suddenly popped into her head.

The student directory!

She sprinted to her dorm room as fast as her (no longer tired) legs

would carry her. She could search his name in the student directory and find out his contact information – his college email address, even where his dorm room was. She was sure NYU didn't intend for the directory to be used this way but, desperate times called for desperate measures.

Finally reaching her destination, she scrambled up the stairs and into her dorm room. Fueled by adrenaline, she practically threw herself down at her desk and roughly jerked open her laptop. She typed in the web address for the NYU home page and scrolled down a bit before she finally found the link to the student directory. She typed in her required student ID number to access the directory that the school had set up as a security measure.

She typed in his name into the search bar and clicked. It felt like forever before the results finally popped up.

Michael Wheeler

MWheeler@NYU.edu

Room 51, Nelligan Hall

Well that was easy, Jane thought triumphantly. She quickly scribbled his dorm room on a scrap piece of paper.

Tomorrow. She clutched the piece of paper as though it were her lifeline. *I will go see him tomorrow*.

Slowly, she sank into her bed. The smile plastered on her face hadn't faded ever since...

Since she saw it...

Her heart felt swollen, still remembering the mural – an entire portrait of her?! She giggled to herself, feeling completely inspired by his bravado. He was risking discipline from the school for that stunt. All for her. Jane repeated his name, whispering it to herself like it was a secret for her ears alone.

“Mike Wheeler...” The shy artist who had blushed furiously at her naked form.

I guess he wasn't so shy after all.

Her heart was pounding with adrenaline. She wrapped her arms around herself and closed her eyes. She desperately wished Mike Wheeler was in her bedroom right now, so she could thank the artist properly.

Hopefully, that would be soon.

Meanwhile, across campus, Mike was back in his own dorm room. A strange mixture of nervousness and excitement was bubbling through his body. His hands and fingers were stained and smeared with various colors and types of paint. He was shaking with anticipation.

Will she see the mural?

Will she try to find me?

Will she think I'm a creep?

Am I a creep?

He laid his head down on his pillow and stared at the ceiling, too full of energy and questions to sleep.

Tuesday

The next day, the mysterious mural was now an overnight campus legend. Hushed rumors flew about Mike Wheeler and Eleven; the students were buzzing with excitement about who they were and exactly *how* (and *why*!) the mural came to be painted on the brick wall of the dining hall. The only four students who knew for certain were studying for midterms in the library.

“How much trouble do you think Mike is going to get into for this?”

“Oh please, the school has had pranks worse than this. He’ll probably just have to wash it off the wall and that will be the end of it.”

“Do you think it will even wash off?”

“Not the spray paint.”

“What do you think, Mike? Mike? MIKE???”

Mike looked up from his notebook, a content goofy smile on his face. “Sorry, what did you say?”

Dustin and Lucas glanced at each other, sharing the same thought. “You’re such a dope,” Lucas laughed. “I guess that’s what happens when you become obsessed with some *girl*.”

Mike didn’t take the bait. His smile remained as his eyes turned downward to his notes. “Hmm. Okay. Thanks.”

Will changed the topic. “So, who else is ready for Spring Break?”

Dustin let out an exaggerated sigh and rubbed the exhaustion from his eyes. “Who the hell *isn’t* ready for Spring Break?! This midterm shit is murder! I have my Biology midterm on Thursday and it’s going to suck.”

“I just have to finish a Law Ethics paper,” said Lucas. “Glad I don’t have to study for any midterms like the rest of you losers.”

“Well our Art midterm tomorrow shouldn’t be that bad,” said Will. “I think Mr. Moss will go pretty easy on us. Right Mike?”

The goofy smile remained. “Yup.”

“Anyway, since we are all going back to Hawkins for Spring Break, I think we should all take turns driving the rental car back home.”

“When are you picking it up from the rental place?” Dustin asked.

“Friday morning,” confirmed Will. “How should we decide who drives first? Alphabetical order by first name?”

“Very funny man,” said Lucas dryly. “How about alphabetical by *last* name, Byers?”

Will laughed good-naturedly. “Fine with me. Does that work for you, Mike?”

A content, dreamy sigh. “Uh-huh.”

Will, Lucas, and Dustin looked at each other and laughed silently to themselves. Mike was in his own world and it was hilarious. Would he ever get over this girl?

Mike’s cell phone started buzzing. He glanced at it to see who was calling him. He didn’t recognize the number.

“Hello?” He asked cautiously.

“Mike Wheeler, please.” The voice that answered seemed cold and serious.

“This is Mike,” he replied, curious of what the voice wanted.

“This is Andrew Richards, I am the Academic Dean of NYU. I’d like to see you in my office immediately.”

Mike’s heart sank. His three friends were looking at him nervously like he was about to grow a second head. “Yes sir, I’ll be right there.”

He hung up the phone and looked at his friends. “It was the Dean.”

Will’s eyes widened. “That’s not good.”

Lucas looked sympathetic. “Sorry man. Just keep your shit together.”

Mike stood up from the table. “Yeah. I’ll try.”

Dustin tried to be helpful. “Good luck, Mike. I’m sure he’ll go easy on you.”

Dean Richards was a stout man with a pudgy face. His eyebrows were

sternly knitted together in what looked like frustration.

“Have a seat,” he said shortly, sounding incredibly displeased.

“Are you a smart student, Mr. Wheeler?”

Mike was taken aback. He didn’t know how to answer that question. Was it some kind of trick? “Um, I think so, sir.”

“So you know the definition of *vandalism*?”

Mike refused to be intimidated. “I didn’t vandalize anything.”

“You have defaced school property by painting the wall of the dining hall!” Dean Richards spat with a patronizing tone. “Or did you think it was a smart idea to sign your name at the bottom of your little work of art?”

Mike said nothing, crossing his arms. His glare hardened.

“This is a violation of the student code of conduct,” continued the dean. “We are taking this matter very seriously, Mr. Wheeler.”

Mike remained silent, glaring back at the man across from him. He couldn’t say he was shocked by the dean’s reaction.

“Well?” Asked the dean. “Don’t you have anything to say for yourself?”

“I’m sorry,” Mike forced himself to say, figuring it would be in his best interest to simply apologize. “I will clean it up. I’m sure it will wash off – ”

“I don’t think so, Mr. Wheeler,” Dean Richards interrupted, pursing his lips. “It will take an *extensive* removal process. We have to hire professionals to get rid of that garbage.”

Garbage?! Something inside Mike snapped. “She’s not fucking garbage, you ignorant pig! It’s a beautiful portrait of a beautiful woman. Apparently you don’t know fine art when you see it.”

“That’s certainly not ‘fine art,’ Mr. Wheeler. That is no better than the tasteless graffiti on the subway. It’s *trash!*”

Mike stood up, knocking back the chair he was sitting in with surprising force. “Fuck you, asshole! Seriously? FUCK YOU!”

The Dean’s eyes narrowed. His voice grew even colder. “You are hereby suspended from NYU until further notice. In the meantime, you are banned from this campus for your extreme outburst.”

Mike froze. “Suspended? What about my midterms?”

“Frankly, Mr. Wheeler, that’s not my concern. I fail to see how you represent the kind of student that deserves to attend NYU. We do have a reputation to uphold after all. You are being asked to leave campus immediately.”

Immediately?

Mike felt as though he had been slapped, but his eyes betrayed no hint of his internal emotion. He would stand strong against this asshole of a Dean.

“You will receive a letter in the mail with details about your suspension and a future trial to determine whether or not we will escalate this matter to *expulsion* from NYU and possible criminal charges. I expect you to be out of your dorm within the hour.”

Mike slammed the door to the office on his way out. Rage was bubbling inside of him and his blood was pumping so fast. He headed back to the library. He had to tell the guys.

“How could that asshole do this to you during midterms?!” Dustin was incredulous.

“Yeah,” Lucas agreed. “I just figured you would get community service or a fine or something. I didn’t think they would take it to the

extreme.”

Will nodded solemnly. “It’s certainly uncalled for, Mike, but I’m sure your temper didn’t help the situation.”

Mike flailed his arms wildly and raised his voice. “He called her garbage! He called her trash! He’s a *fucking* – ”

“MR. WHEELER,” yelled the librarian. “Control yourself or we will remove you from the library!”

Mike sat down in a huff and lowered his voice. “Can you believe that?!”

“He wasn’t calling *her* trash, man, just the portrait,” corrected Lucas.

“Same thing!”

Lucas raised an eyebrow and looked at Mike skeptically.

“She’s the most beautiful girl I’ve ever seen and he will not disrespect her portrait like that. No one will ever disrespect her again.”

“Okay, calm down, Romeo.” Dustin shushed his friend, slightly worried about his extreme obsessive behavior. “On a separate note,

what are you going to do now? He said you were banned from campus and we don't leave until Friday. Where are you going to stay for three more days?"

Mike hadn't thought of that.

"I-I don't know..." he stammered. "I guess I could check into a hotel in the meantime."

Will nodded again, sympathetically. "That's probably the best option. If they found any of us hiding you in our dorm rooms, we would all get in trouble too." Always the voice of reason.

Mike stood up. "Well, I guess I'll go pack and find a hotel..."

"Do you need any help?" Dustin offered.

"Nah, I'm okay. Good luck on midterms guys. Text me later if you want to meet for dinner off campus or something."

Before she climbed the stairs, Jane double (and triple) checked the dorm address she had written down, to make sure she was definitely, absolutely, no-question going to the correct place.

Room 51, Nelligan Hall.

She clutched the piece of paper, her hand feeling clammy with sweat. Her insecurities were getting the better of her. What if he didn't want to see her? What if the mural was just a joke? What if he wasn't really the amazing, sensitive artist that she thought he was?

Nerves wracking her insides, she gathered her courage and knocked softly on the door. Her stomach churned as she waited for a response.

Several agonizing seconds passed. Her head was swimming.

She lifted her hand again and knocked, louder this time.

No response.

She pressed her ear to the door, listening for any signs of life inside the room. No snores, no computer keyboard sounds. Nothing.

He isn't here...

Jane fought her disappointment. She had taken the chance to come here and meet him face-to-face, and he wasn't even here?

But she wouldn't give up that easily. She dug through her bag until she found a pen. She tore a piece of paper from one of her notebooks, to write him a quick note. She stuck it into the hinge of the door and turned to walk back down the stairs, nodding a quick greeting to a shaggy-haired boy who was walking down the hallway.

Hopefully, Mike Wheeler would return to his room soon and he would see her note...

Mike climbed the stairs of his dorm in a daze. How the hell would he tell his parents about what happened? He buried his face in his hand. They had been so excited when he got accepted into NYU. 'It's a great school to study business,' his father had said, proud of his son for following in his lame, yuppie footsteps. Once Mike was saddled with the official business major, there was no turning back. They were going to be so disappointed...

He made his way down the hallway to his room. He really wasn't looking forward to packing up all of his shit. He had a bunch of clothes and school supplies and...wait a minute – what the hell is that on his door?

There was some kind of weird piece of paper stuck in the hinge of the door. Probably the notice of suspension the dean had promised to send. But that seemed so soon.

Before Mike could reach for the piece of paper and examine it, a shaggy-haired kid walked by him. It was James, from his art class.

“Yo Mike.”

“Hey,” Mike said nonchalantly. The two had been acquaintances since they had the same art class and lived in the same dorm, but they weren’t exactly friends.

“Some chick was here just a few minutes ago. I passed her when I was headed to the bathroom. She left that note on your door.”

Wait...what?

“Do you know who it was?”

“I kind of recognized her,” James said casually. “Kind of looked like that hot naked chick from art class a few weeks ago.”

No fucking way!

Mike’s eyes grew wild. He grabbed James roughly by the shirt. He was desperate to know the truth. “Are you fucking with me, man?!”

“Woah, dude, no.” James calmly took Mike’s hands and gently

pushed him away. "I'm definitely not fucking with you. She was just here, I swear. You must have just missed her."

Mike quickly picked up the note and rushed into his dorm, slamming the door and leaving a very confused James standing in the hallway.

He immediately opened the folds of the paper and started reading.

"The portrait is beautiful. I want to see you. Please come to my dance recital on Friday night. 6pm at Dablon Performing Arts Center. – Jane Brenner aka 'Eleven'."

Jane Brenner...

She found him. She wanted him. Mike was overflowing with emotion. She's a dancer. And he had every intention of going to her dance recital; nothing on this earth could stop him. Not even the threat of expulsion.

Mike realized he would throw everything away to find her, to be with her. He laughed, thinking of how 'amused' his father would be if he discovered Mike's priorities in life.

Mike could fucking care less. His heart was soaring. He looked around his dorm room, scanning the things he would need to take with him.

Fuck it. He grabbed a duffle bag and started shoving in his clothes, art supplies, and his laptop. He made sure he had his phone charger, his wallet, and the note from *her*. Nothing else in this room mattered.

He didn't even give the room a second look on his way out.

Wednesday

Mike was confined to his hotel room, like a bird in a cage. He hasn't had the heart to tell his parents about what happened at NYU. All they know is that he is coming back home on Friday for Spring Break. He'll tell them in due time. When he's ready.

Right now, all he wants is to see his dancer.

His dancer?

How could he be so possessive of her? He laughed manically to himself. He was obsessed and going off the deep end. His life was falling apart and coming together at the same time – a beautiful sort of destruction that was breaking down all of the bullshit and lies in his life and building up...something else. It felt oddly perfect.

Thursday

Jane felt so alive walking to her final dance rehearsal with Mrs. Marzoni. The entire campus had been talking for days about her artist.

Her artist?

It was scary how much she liked the sound of that. And how much she wanted to keep him.

She only hoped that he had gotten her letter about the recital. Would he want to see her dance? Jane clung to any scrap of hope inside of her that he would be there.

“Amazing! Absolutely amazing!” Mrs. Marzoni was applauding Jane after their last rehearsal. “You have shown tremendous improvement. Your energy seems completely revitalized!”

Jane beamed, so proud of herself. She internally thanked her artist for providing the inspiration. “Thank you, Mrs. Marzoni.”

“I am moving your solo to the last performance of the night. Your routine will be the perfect ending to enchant the audience!”

Jane was speechless. The last performance was usually reserved for the best dancers, like a grand finale. “The last performance? T-Thank you so much!”

Mrs. Marzoni waved her hand dismissively. “Don’t thank me, dear. You’ve absolutely earned it!” She took Jane gently by the shoulders. “Now, I want you to get a good night’s rest. We have a big day ahead of us tomorrow! You’ll dance beautifully.”

Friday: The Recital

Mike was practically bouncing off the walls with excitement. Today was the day. Not only would he see her again, but he would see her dance. He would bet his left arm that she was an amazing dancer.

He shuffled through his duffle bag full of clothes. What the fuck should he wear?

His phone suddenly buzzed. Will was calling him. Oh shit! He forgot to tell the guys about the dance recital tonight and they were still planning on leaving for Hawkins!

He answered the phone. “Hey Will.”

“Hey Mike, I just picked up the rental car. I’ll pick you up in twenty minutes and then we can get Lucas and Dustin – ”

“Yeah listen, I have something to tell you.”

“What?” Asked Will, concerned. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing it’s...I just...she contacted me.”

“Holy shit, she *contacted* you? What did she say?!”

“She’s having a dance recital tonight. She wants me to go.”

“Wait...so then – ”

“You guys just go back to Hawkins without me,” Mike said. “I’ll figure something else out.”

Will didn’t answer right away. “Mike,” he began. “Are you sure that’s a good idea?”

“Will, I have to be there. I have to see her again.”

Mike could picture Will nodding his head. “Yeah, I guess you do. Let me know how everything goes. Good luck!”

Jane was nervous. Extremely nervous. Her fingers fumbled in her dressing room as she was doing her hair, pinning it into a sleek bun. What if he didn’t like her? What if she messed up her dance routine? What if, what if, what if...

“Jane, dear?” Mrs. Marzoni asked. “Are you ready to change into your costume?”

The costume. The one that was so expensive, she had to volunteer to let an art student paint her naked in order to help pay for it.

She took a deep breath. No more what-ifs. Jane wouldn’t let him down. Ever.

“Yes. I’m ready.”

Mike thought that sneaking back onto campus would be like a secret, black ops mission. It was surprisingly easy, however. He made it to the Dablon Performing Arts Center and paid the small admission fee to enter the dance recital. Students, parents, and professors all hung around in the lobby waiting for the show to start.

“Mr. Wheeler.”

Shit! Someone spotted him. He wasn't supposed to be on campus. Mike spun around, his heart beating fast.

He came face to face with Mr. Moss, his old art professor.

“H-Hello, sir.” Mike felt his face getting red.

“I'm glad to see you here.”

Glad? Mike's eyebrows scrunched in confusion. *What the fuck?*

“Why, sir?”

The professor's eyes twinkled. “Because it means you don't care what they think.”

Mike said nothing, even more confused than before.

Mr. Moss cleared his throat awkwardly. "Well, I'm on your side. Just remember that. I won't tell anyone you're here against the orders of your suspension."

"You know about that?" Mike's eyes widened.

"Of course I do. They notified all of your professors about the situation so we could plan our midterms accordingly."

Mike nodded. That made sense.

Mr. Moss lowered his voice. "You should probably hide out in the theater. It's nice and dark in there, no one will see you."

"Thank you, sir. I appreciate it." Before he could turn and walk into the theater, Mr. Moss stopped him.

"By the way, Mr. Wheeler, I just want you to know that I was incredibly impressed with your portrait. Your best work all semester, I'd say."

He grinned at the younger boy, who smiled back before making his way into the shadowy theater. He found a seat in the middle of the

theater and waited for the dance recital to begin.

Soon, more and more people started filtering in from the lobby, blending Mike in with the rest of the crowd. The usual crowd noises could be heard – people chatting softly, phones buzzing, people shifting in their squeaky seats. Mike waited anxiously. His palms were beginning to sweat.

The theater lights dimmed even lower, signaling the start of the recital. A single spotlight suddenly illuminated the stage. A middle-aged woman was standing there.

“Welcome everyone, to the New York University Spring Dance Recital!” Several audience members clapped and whooped in response. “We are thrilled to have you here with us this evening. Our dance students have been working hard all semester and I’m excited for them to show you what they have been working on...”

Come the fuck on, get to the point! What the hell is this lady even talking about? Mike felt like he was going to explode with anticipation.

“I know you will all be impressed with our dancers. Without further ado, let’s begin!” The audience clapped. The lights dimmed again. When the stage lit back up, several dancers began to flit across the stage to a classical tune Mike didn’t know.

Mike squinted to make out their faces, but didn’t recognize anyone. Disappointed, he slunk back into his seat and waited for the next group of dancers to make their way onto the stage. After several more rounds of squinting at unfamiliar dancers on the stage, Mike

crossed his arms.

What if she never came out to dance?

What if she had already danced but I didn't recognize her?

What if she was just fucking with me?

What if I sit here forever?

The recital dragged on, slightly boring Mike since *his* dancer wasn't the one on stage. Yet.

"And now, it is time for our final performance of the night. You are all in for a treat this evening. Our last performance will be a solo, danced by a young woman with an amazing talent."

Mike crossed his fingers. Could it be...?

"Jane Brenner!"

YES!

Mike nearly yelled in triumph in the middle of the theater. Suddenly, his jaw hit the floor in awe.

Holy shit, there she is.

A dancer in a pink leotard and long skirt crossed the stage, moving in rhythm to the music. The song is slow, and sad. It told a story of loss and loneliness. Mike was captivated. Every movement told another piece of the puzzle, and slowly the mystery surrounding this dancer became clearer.

She had been hurt, by someone close to her, in a devastating way. Mike felt his stomach twist with rage. He would ruin the person who put her through that.

But she also conveyed an inner strength...and a sense of independence.

Jane was on stage now. She had done her dance routine so many times, she could do it in her sleep. But her body was coming alive like it never had before.

He's watching me...

He was out in audience somewhere, fueling her fire. Her spirit soared knowing her was here, for her. It didn't even scare her that she could feel his presence.

She felt electric.

Everyone else in the audience was melting away, leaving Mike alone in his thoughts. It felt like this was a private moment between them.

She's dancing just for me.

He felt a heaviness in his loins.

He wanted her, he realized. All of her. The good and the bad. He wished he could hold her and absorb all of her pain like a sponge. He would drown her in kisses and make her happy. Forever.

He didn't realize he was crying.

Her elegance, her grace...were her feet even touching the floor? Her fluid movements cut him to the core. He was drowning. He was dripping. Like a cup overflowing with liquid.

Mike couldn't tear his eyes away from her. Her performance was magnetic. He could feel himself getting up out of his seat. He was walking down the aisle, moving closer to the stage. His body was on autopilot; she was reeling him in. He was floating. Like a feather caught in the wind. Powerless.

She danced perfectly in sync with the music, moving like silk under the stage lights.

Mike was mere feet away from the stage now. He could see the delicate details of her face.

Her beautiful face...

The music was climaxing. Jane's heart was thumping in anticipation ...anticipation of what? Her skin tingled like a strange sort of electricity was in the air.

Time for the big finish.

The music stopped. She was in her finished pose. Her arm outstretched towards the ceiling, her leg extended beautifully – every inch the dancer she always wanted to become.

Perfect! A smile was spreading across her face. She had nailed it!

She heard the crowd cheer. They loved it! The spotlight on her was fading. She looked up. Before the light dimmed and the curtain

closed, she saw him standing there.

Her heart lurched. *Oh my god, there he is!*

Before she can react, Mrs. Marzoni was excitedly pulling her off stage to line up and take her final bows with the other dancers.

“You did it, dear! You were amazing!”

The red velvet curtain closed in Mike’s face, but he was not deterred. He stayed glued to the stage, wishing he could just rip down the damned curtain and whisk his dancer away...

Each group of dancers came up in the order of their performances and took their final bows in front of the audience. When it was Jane’s turn, the audience exploded – wild hoots and cheers and squeals to show their appreciation for the dancer.

Mike was clapping the loudest, whooping with joy and looking up at her with admiration. He could see happy tears running down her beautiful face. She looked like she was in heaven.

And she looked down at him. Her smile grew bigger. She rushed down the stairs on the side of the stage and ran to him. She

catapulted herself into his arms and he caught her, holding her (finally!) close to his chest.

“You came,” she whispered.

“Of course,” Mike said softly. “I wouldn’t miss it for the world.”

Notes for the Chapter:

Also, I feel like I should ask:

I am considering making some future scenes more...adult. *wink wink*

Is this something you would be interested in seeing?
Let me know so I can decide where to go! :)

5. Chapter 5

Summary for the Chapter:

Mike and Jane bond. Lots o' fluff.

Notes for the Chapter:

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

I apologize for the long wait between chapters. The holidays kind of slowed me down a bit. Sorry, loves!

And WOW! Can I just say? You all leave the BEST comments. Thank you SO MUCH - you all make my day!!! I'm blown away by the response to this little story.

Also, one more thing. I did something for this chapter I've never done before. That is, I put together a chapter soundtrack. Actually, it's more like a collection of songs that came up on my playlist as I was writing this chapter that made me go "Hey, that definitely reflects what's going on in this chapter..." So, I hope you enjoy that little addition.

Song list:

"First Date" – Blink 182

"Sit Next to Me" – Foster the People

"Since We're Alone" – Niall Horan

"The Real Thing" – Bo Bice

"Forever" – Brian McKnight

I'm not 100% happy with this chapter, but here we go anyway. I hope you all enjoy!!!!

After they pulled away from their hug, awkwardness hung in the air around them. What the hell should they do now?

It was hard for them to make eye contact. Jane looked down shyly at her feet. Mike looked everywhere but at the girl in front of him who he'd been obsessing over for the last two weeks. He'd thought of little else except of her finally being in front of him. And now that she was here, in the flesh, what the hell should he say?

"So," he stammered, heat creeping up his back. A blush found its way to his cheeks. "That was beautiful. Your dancing, I mean."

"You liked it?" She asked, slightly surprised.

Mike was taken aback. "Of course I did, it was amazing."

The words left his lips and he hadn't realized that his surge of confidence had allowed him to give her such a big compliment. "You are a wonderful dancer," he continued, suddenly less afraid. "Seriously."

Jane's smile widened and Mike felt a rush of happiness. She looked up and her light brown eyes met his.

"Thank you, Mike. I'm glad you came."

"Me too."

Another silence settled between them as they stared at each other, noticeably less awkward than the first.

"Oh Jane, dear!"

Jane turned around. Mrs. Marzoni was making her way toward them, her hand outstretched in a wave. "You have an audience of admirers to greet," she said proudly. "Some people want to congratulate you on your outstanding performance."

Jane quickly turned back to Mike, her eyes pleading. "I have to go. Wait here for me?"

Mike nodded furiously. Jane flashed another smile and gave him a

quick kiss on the cheek before she ran to greet her dance teacher.

The auditorium was quickly emptying out after the performance, so he sat down in one of the front-row chairs to wait for her.

His skin tingled where her lips had pressed against his cheek. He would gladly wait forever.

Jane was led around by Mrs. Marzoni to meet a few directors from the art department, big-wigs from the school administration, even a few talent reps from Broadway.

Broadway! Her heart stuck in her chest at the thought of her name in lights one day, dancing on the world's most famous stage.

If only...

After politely accepting their congratulatory remarks and shaking several hands, Mrs. Marzoni gave her the green light to go back to her dressing room and get changed.

After the door to her dressing room closed and her ears were greeted with welcome silence, Jane started to realize how tired she was.

And hungry.

And...

And Mike was waiting for her! She couldn't believe he had actually shown up. She sighed, grateful that he had accepted her invitation. As she changed out of her dance costume, she wondered where the rest of the night would take them. Hopefully, he wouldn't want to end the night too soon - they had only just reconnected! Realistically, Spring Break had now officially started and she knew that he would probably be leaving the campus to go back home. Wherever that was.

But she refused to think about that. She steered her thoughts away from his inevitable departure.

Their night was only just beginning.

Changed in her regular clothes with her dance bag tucked under her arm, Jane made her way back to the auditorium where Mike was waiting. He stood up and smiled, watching her approach him.

“So,” he started, “Do you want to...do...something?”

“Do something?”

“Like...if you’re hungry...we could, you know...grab a bite to eat somewhere?”

“Yes, I’m starving.”

“Great! Well, not great that you’re *starving* but...I mean...great that I can fix that.”

“No, I can pay for myself,” Jane insisted. He had done so much for her already – painting the mural, attending her dance recital... She was desperate to not seem like she was taking advantage of him. “You don’t have to do that.”

Mike was confused. Why didn't she want him to take her out and treat her to a special night? "But I *want* to do it. I want to do something nice for you."

"Nice?" She looked down and her voice dropped to a whisper. "I don't deserve it. I've done nothing for you."

"That's not the point. The point is I want to make you feel good. It will make me happy to do something special for you."

He's such a gentleman.

Jane's shy smile returned, filling Mike's heart with pure joy. He gently grabbed her hand, reveling in how soft her skin was.

"Come on, let's go." He tugged her forward, eager to spend time with her.

"Okay."

Mike loved walking through the city at night. There was something truly magical about all of the lights shimmering like stars against the dark sky. The two walked in comfortable silence, sharing quick glances and smiles every minute or so.

Mike took her to an Italian restaurant that was close to his hotel. He had walked by it earlier and was interested in checking it out.

They walked inside and were taken to a table right away. After a waiter filled their water glasses, they opened their menus to decide what to eat.

But Mike was distracted. He kept secretly glancing over the top of his menu to get another glimpse of her, feeling like he could never stare at her long enough. He loved the way her eyebrows furrowed in concentration, her eyes darting quickly across the page...

She is truly beautiful...

“Are you staring at me?”

Jane looked up from her menu, a sly smile on her face. Caught in the act! Mike fumbled at the question. “Uh – no! I mean, yes! Uh...I mean...I was just wondering what you’re going to order. You know, there’s so many choices and uh, I was just curious...”

Nice save, Wheeler. God, he felt like such an idiot.

“Oh,” Jane appeared slightly disappointed and glanced back down at her menu. “I’m not sure. I suppose I’m always a fan of spaghetti and meatballs.”

Mike chuckled slightly. “Me too! That sounds awesome actually. I think I’ll copy you.”

Two heaping plates of spaghetti and meatballs came to the table. Mike and Jane were in the middle of a conversation about school. They were getting along splendidly.

“So you’ve been dancing your whole life?” Mike asked, digging his fork into his spaghetti and twirling it.

Jane nodded. “I’ve always loved dancing. I’ve wanted to be a famous dancer for as long as I can remember.” She shook her head slightly. “I know, it’s kind of stupid and cliché...”

“Oh my God,” Mike said, baffled at her lack of self-confidence. “That’s so cool. You are an amazing dancer. I bet you’ll be famous in no time – especially after your recital tonight. You were clearly the best.”

Mike winked, earning a giggle from Jane. Her face was turning red. “Mike...”

“I’m serious!” he continued. “Good thing you were on stage last. Your dance made everyone else’s dances look like dogshit.”

That did it – Jane burst out laughing. It was the most musical sound Mike had ever heard. It made his heart soar. He triumphantly took a bite of his spaghetti.

“Thank you, Mike.”

“You’re welcome.”

“You’re a very good painter. Are you an art student?”

Mike’s smile faded slightly. “No, my major is Business.”

Jane seemed surprised. “Oh. I just thought that since...well, never mind...”

“No, that’s okay. What were you going to say?” Mike was curious to know her thoughts.

“Well, the mural...of me...” Jane blushed a pretty shade of pink. “It was beautiful. You’re very talented. You would make a wonderful artist.”

Mike grinned, feeling his own cheeks heating up. Now it was his turn to be bashful. “Thank you, Jane. But it wasn’t my ‘talent’ – I had a beautiful muse for inspiration.”

He winked again, wondering how the hell he thought of something so suave.

Jane seemed amused. She delicately raised an eyebrow. “Is that so?”

“It is, indeed, so.”

“Why do you study Business. Don’t you love to paint?” She was eager to know the answer. He was clearly such a talented artist – why wouldn’t he follow through with NYU’s prestigious art program?

Mike sighed. “Because it’s what my dad wants me to do. He wants me to follow in his footsteps. And he is helping me pay for school, so...”

He trailed off, but Jane nodded in understanding. “That makes sense.”

“I’d love to study art actually,” Mike continued, getting lost in thought. “It’s much more relaxing than studying macroeconomics and business policy.”

Jane shuddered. “I can imagine. That sounds horrible. No offense.”

“None taken,” Mike assured her. “I just don’t know how to bring that up to my father. He can be so...insensitive.”

Jane quieted, nodding slowly. “I know exactly how *that* feels...”

Mike felt a chill run up his spine. What did she mean by that...?

Jane sensed his confusion. She didn't like to talk about her past, but Mike made her feel safe. He had opened up to her, and she wanted to open up to him. "My father was...abusive."

Abusive! Mike instantly saw red. *The fucker –*

"My mother died when I was born. I don't have any living family members. I was emancipated from my father and I'm attending school on grant funding."

Mike's heart broke at her story. Her emotional dance at her recital suddenly made sense. The pain, the suffering she had been through over the years... "I'm so sorry, Jane." He gently put his hand over hers. She squeezed back, smiling shyly.

"It's okay. I don't have to deal with him anymore. I stay on campus during breaks."

"Don't the dorms close during breaks?"

"Technically, yes. But there are a few students that they make exceptions for. Like the international students. And me. It gets lonely, but...it's life, I suppose."

“I don’t want you to be lonely anymore,” Mike blurted out.

Jane smiled, squeezing his hand again. “I’m not lonely right now. I have a cute artist to keep me company.”

The rest of the meal was peppered with smiles, laughter, and jokes between the two. When the two plates of spaghetti were clear (Jane must have *actually* been starving...) Mike reached for his wallet to pay for the meal.

He knew he didn’t have enough cash to cover the expense. He had spent his last few dollars on the hotel room. But then...he saw his father’s credit card behind his driver’s license. It was supposed to be for emergencies only.

Fuck it.

Mike plopped the credit card down on the table to cover the check. He would definitely be hearing a lecture about responsibility in the morning...by then, his parents would be aware that he hadn't driven back to Hawkins with his friends

He wasn’t sure what he was going to tell them but right now, he didn’t care either. He glanced across the table at his dining companion. She smiled brightly back at him. Right now, there was only one thing that mattered.

After the meal was paid for, the two made their way out of the restaurant. They walked around, hand in hand. Jane leaned her head on Mike's shoulder as they walked.

Nerves bubbled up inside of him. *Now what should they do?*

Jane broke the silence. "When are you leaving?"

"Huh? Leaving for what?" Mike asked.

"For Spring Break," she clarified, as if it were obvious. "Do you stay on campus during breaks too?"

Oh, that. She didn't know about...

Mike suddenly felt embarrassed at the confession he had to make.

"Um, well actually...I'm not staying on campus. I'm kind of...suspended. From school."

Jane whipped around to face him. "What?! What do you mean?"

Mike internally kicked himself at having to reveal such an embarrassing situation. It made him feel like such a loser. "I got suspended. For the mural. They said I vandalized school property. I've been staying at a hotel."

"Oh, Mike..." Jane felt incredibly guilty, internalizing his struggles as though they were her own. "This is all my fault, I'm sorry."

"What? No, this isn't your fault. How could you think that?"

"But – " She began, before he cut her off.

"Listen," he said firmly. "This is not your fault. I made my own choices and now I have to deal with them. Don't feel bad, you've done nothing wrong."

Jane was silent. Her eyes focused on the ground. Mike gently tilted her head up to look him.

"This is not your fault. I promise."

"You promise?" Tears prickled the edges of her eyes. Mike's heart froze at the sight of her sadness. He pulled her close to him and cupped her cheek gently. She nuzzled into his touch.

"I *promise*," he said again.

Jane suddenly wrapped her arms around him and pressed her body against his in a hug. Mike returned the embrace, feeling dizzy from the close contact. He was taller than her. Her small frame fit against his perfectly. They stood like that for a few minutes, just letting the silence settle between them again.

“I don’t want this night to end,” Mike whispered in her ear.

“Me neither,” she whispered back.

“I can walk you back to your dorm if you want,” Mike offered, reluctant for her to leave. He slowly pulled away from their embrace, feeling a rush of cool air between them.

“That’s not what I want.” She shook her head and smiled up at him. “I want to be with you.”

“I know it’s kind of late but...my hotel is right around the corner. We could hang out there if you want. And maybe watch a movie or something?”

Mike knew how bad it probably sounded that he had just invited her up to his hotel room. He didn’t mean it like *that*; he just wanted to spend more time with her.

“Okay, that sounds fun.”

“Great,” Mike replied, feeling lighter than air. He pulled her close to him and wrapped his arm around her shoulder, leading her down the street. “Let’s go.”

They made their way up to Mike’s hotel room, exhaustion creeping up on them with each step they took. As soon as they entered the room, Mike sprawled out on the bed and turned on the TV. Jane sat down cautiously. She slowly crept up to the head of the bed and gingerly rested on a pillow.

She didn’t want to give the wrong impression that she had come up to his hotel room for...something else. She just didn’t want their night together to end.

“What do you want to watch?” Mike asked, flipping through channels.

“I don’t care. Anything.”

Mike settled on a random comedy movie. “Oh! How about this movie? I haven’t seen it since the guys and I saw it at the movie theater.”

“The guys?”

“My best friends,” he clarified. “Will, Dustin, and Lucas. We are all going to NYU together.”

“Really?” She seemed fascinated. “That’s really nice.”

Mike scoffed. “They get on my nerves sometimes, but they’re fun. You’d like them.”

Jane was sure she would. Any friends would be better than none at all.

Mike laughed, thinking of something. “Actually, just the other day, we were all sitting in the library and – ”

Hours later, the TV was forgotten. Mike had Jane in *stitches*, telling her all about his friends’ crazy antics. Her stomach was clenched tightly from laughing so hard.

“So Dustin is standing there, drenched in orange juice, and he got juice *all over the floor* and then our high school principal comes out and *slips* in the middle of the cafeteria!”

“Oh my God!” Tears of laughter were streaming down her face. Mike’s friends seemed absolutely hilarious.

Mike was laughing just as hard, Jane’s laughter fueling his own as he remembered the story. “And I swear, the look on his face was *priceless*! Dustin got detention for like a *week*!”

Jane continued to laugh. “I can’t imagine what it was like to be there and actually see it happen! I wish I could have seen that.”

“Yeah well, there’s always crazy stuff happening whenever we’re together. Like this other time, Will practically *disappeared* and...”

Jane was completely enraptured. Hours had passed and she had heard all about his childhood and growing up in Hawkins. She wishes she could have been there too. He was so fascinating to her. Every story, every memory made her understand just a little bit more about him.

And he was so *funny*.

Her stomach ached from how much he had made her laugh. Her cheeks were sore from being stretched into a smile. It was a good feeling. She had known pain and loneliness all her life but Mike was different. With him, it was just so *easy*. She could talk about anything and not feel like she would be judged. Or she could say nothing at all and let comfortable silence hang in the air between them.

As time had passed in the hotel room, she had unknowingly moved closer to him on the bed. She felt herself falling harder for him.

Mike yawned. Their conversations had reached a lull, but he felt so close to this girl. He had told her about himself and she listened, fascinated with every detail. He made her laugh. A lot. And it did wonders for his ego. He loved telling stories and it was wonderful to have a captive audience. He felt like he was in a beautiful dream. How could he be so lucky to find this amazing person?

He closed his eyes, enjoying the bliss.

“Mike?” Her voice was timid.

His eyes remained closed. “Hmm?”

“It’s late. Do you want me to leave?”

His eyes snapped open. *No, don’t leave. Please.*

How could he convince her to stay with him? He didn’t even want to try anything...inappropriate. He just wanted to simply be close to her.

“Do you want to leave?” He asked, slightly dreading her answer.

She shook her head. "Can I stay here, with you?"

Mike's tongue felt like it was sticking to the roof of his mouth. "Y-Yes," he stammered, suddenly aware of every nerve in his body. "You can stay."

Her smile could set the sun on fire.

Even with the lights off the two barely sleep, still enjoying their incredible pillow talk. They laugh together in the darkness of the room. They end up talking until the sun rises, trading comfortable whispers in the dawn.

The early morning light started to stream through the windows. Her head was resting on his shoulder. Mike could barely make out the outline of her body in the shadows. They felt less like strangers and more like best friends.

"Mike..." She began, worry clouding her voice. "When are you going back home to Hawkins?"

His heart lurched with dread. That was a good question. When was he going back?

His father would kill him.

His mother would be disappointed.

Nancy would huff and roll her eyes.

The guys would just shrug and make jokes and pay each other off on the bets they probably made.

(Will would probably win).

“I’m not.”

He turns toward her and cups her cheek with his hand. He stares into her warm brown eyes.

“I’m not going home,” he repeats, more serious than he’s ever been in his life. “I know this is crazy but...I don’t want to go back. I want to stay here. With you.”

He closes the space between their lips. She wraps her arms around his neck and kisses back. He pulls her body closer to his, desperate to smother the space between them. She sighs into their kiss, running her fingers through his hair. He feels a spark, a kindling, something igniting deep within him that tells him their connection is beyond words.

He can tell she feels it too.

True to his word, Mike stayed in the city with Jane. As the days progress, they grow even closer, spending nearly every day together.

One morning, they get coffee. Mike sips his latte too fast, leaving him with a coffee mustache. Jane giggles (which is quickly becoming his favorite sound).

The next night, they walk down the street, hand in hand. He gracefully twirls her (his dancer) around in his arms, enjoying the way her eyes sparkle with starlight.

On a particularly warm day, he paints her in the park. She's all smiles and the sun is beaming down on her shoulders. She can't remember if she's ever been this happy. He hangs the painting in his (their?) hotel room.

Mike tries to play it cool, tries to keep it hidden how obsessive he'd been, when he barely even knew her. Even still, he barely knew her now. But it felt different. It felt like they could have known each other in another lifetime, in another way. They just had a lifetime of catching up to do.

Eventually, he could no longer deny it. Like trying to stop a boulder from rolling down a hill. And it hit him just as hard: he was completely, madly in love with Jane Brenner.

Notes for the Chapter:

So. I asked if a little smutty-smut would be of interest to any of you. Apparently, it wickedly is (you little devils, you!). I have the next chapter about halfway done and it will have some...naughtiness ;)

I'll add tags to reflect this. All aboard the smut train!

6. Chapter 6

Summary for the Chapter:

The smut you've been waiting for (hopefully) !

Notes for the Chapter:

Did someone order some SMUT or what, guys?! :D

This was my very first attempt at smut, so I hope I did alright. Enjoy!!!

“Hi Michael, it’s dad. Just checking in. I bet you’re still driving home right now. We’ll see you in a few hours. Drive safe.”

-Beep- This message has been deleted.

“Good morning, Michael, it’s dad again. You probably got in late and stayed at Will’s. Just wondering where you are. Call me back soon – ”

-Beep- This message has been deleted.

“Michael, your mother is worried sick. Call us back – ”

-Beep- This message has been deleted.

“Hi Michael, it’s mom. I just want to know where you are. Is everything okay? You can talk to me Michael – ”

-Beep- This message has been deleted.

“Michael! What is this credit card charge from a restaurant?! Are you still in the city? You need to come home right now – ”

-Beep- This message has been deleted.

“MICHAEL WHEELER! What the fuck is going on and why aren’t you answering your phone? I am royally pissed and you need to – ”

-Beep- This message has been deleted.

The voicemails had been piling up over the last few days. Mike shuddered with dread; he could practically feel his father’s rage through his phone. He had chosen this moment to finally listen to (and delete) the voicemails because Jane wasn’t in earshot to hear them. Plus, it provided the perfect distraction from Mike’s thoughts wandering into the shower, where she was right now...

Naked...dripping wet...surrounded by steam...

Mike shook his head to rid himself of the thought. He really needed to focus. He looked out the window of the hotel room. The late afternoon sun was setting. How could he convince his parents that staying in New York was a good idea?

Suddenly, his phone started to vibrate.

Fuck. His dad was calling him. Again. He probably wanted to yell at him. Again. Mike reluctantly answered the call. He couldn’t run forever, could he?

“Hello?” He answered, cautiously.

“MICHAEL WHEELER!”

A chill ran up Mike’s spine. His father was *pissed*. “Where the fuck are you?!”

“I’m still in the city dad...”

“Right. You’re in the city, charging my credit card with meals and hotel rooms and whatever other nonsense you’ve needed over the last few days. And now, I just got a letter in the mail that says you were suspended from school for *vandalizing school property*?! My son is a criminal now?!”

“Dad,” Mike said desperately. He flinched as though he had been slapped. “I can explain – ”

“Save it, Michael. You are grounded starting *immediately*. I want you on the *next* flight to Hawkins – that is an *order*! If you aren’t on the next flight home, I’ll drive to the city myself and drag you back by your ears! Do you hear me, young man? AND THAT’S FINAL!”

The phone call ended, signaling his father angrily hanging up. Mike sighed, rubbing his eyes with his fingers.

He had forgotten about the school suspension letter that the asshole Dean Richards had promised to send home. *Of course* he wouldn’t

wait until *after* Spring Break had ended to send such a life-ruining letter...

He sat on the edge of the bed with his head in his hands, letting his anger consume him. He didn't notice Jane standing in the doorway of the bathroom, wrapped in a towel.

"What happened?" She asked softly, clearly worried.

Mike shot up to his feet and rushed over to her, grabbing her hands with his own. "My asshole dad just called, saying I have to go home –"

Her face fell. "Oh."

"Jane, I'm so sorry –"

"This is all my fault," she said, her voice barely above a whisper.

"What?!"

"You painted the mural for me," Jane insisted. "You chose to stay in the city because of me. You got in trouble *because of me*."

"No," Mike denied. "That's not true. I told you before, I made my *own*

choices.”

Jane looked at him sadly, eyes sparkling with tears. “I’m going to miss you, Mike...”

Mike’s heart was breaking. He fucking *hated* seeing her cry. Even worse, she was crying because of *him*.

Mike felt lower than dirt.

He wrapped his arms around her, pulling her close to him. “I’m not going back,” he whispered.

Jane shook her head. “Yes, you are. You have to. I won’t let you stay.”

“But, Jane – ”

“No, Mike.” Her face was determined. She wiped the tears from her cheeks. “Stop running from your problems. I can’t be your excuse.”

Deep in his heart, Mike knew she was right. He had to stop running. He had to face the mess he had created for himself. He had to face his father...

Almost on cue, his phone rang again. Speak of the devil.

“What do you want, dad?” Mike snarled into the phone.

“I didn’t trust you to do it yourself, so I bought you a plane ticket home. Your flight leaves tomorrow morning at 6am *sharp*. I’ll email you the flight confirmation.”

“Thanks,” Mike said insincerely. “I can’t wait to come home.”

“Oh, and one more thing Michael. The credit card of mine that you’ve been using? It’s now deactivated. This will be your last night there, do you hear me? Your LAST NIGHT THERE.”

He ended the call before Mike could respond. Mike’s face contorted with anger. Of course his father had to force him back home. The prick.

“Mike?” Jane was still looking up at him, her brown eyes clouded with sadness.

He sighed deeply, his body collapsing over her small frame. Her hands gently embraced him.

“I don’t want to go,” he croaked into her hair. “I don’t want to leave you.”

She remained silent, holding him closer, tighter. She nuzzled her face into his chest. They stood there together, under a dark cloud of misery, until Jane pressed her hands to Mike's chest and pulled away slightly.

She let her lips do the talking, eyes closed, pulling Mike's head down to meet hers. Their lips smacked gently, their mouths opened. Mike pressed his tongue further to meet hers, begging for more. Their kiss was growing hungrier, more desperate.

Jane's fingers intertwined in Mike's hair, dragging her nails lightly against his scalp. He let out a small moan. She began taking steps backwards, pulling him towards the bed.

And she was still only in her towel...

Fuck...

They had to stop.

"No," he said suddenly, grabbing her hands in his and pulling away from her. He held onto her shoulders, keeping her at a distance.

He didn't want it to be like this. He didn't want to fuck her and fly away. Tomorrow, he would be on a plane heading home, hours away from her.

Jane looked at him expectantly, eyes wide in confusion. Did she cross a line?

“Are you *sure* you want to do this?” Mike asked, worried of pressuring her beyond her comfort zone, worried of hurting her even more...

“Yes,” she whispered, smiling. “I’m sure.”

“This is what you want?” He confirmed again. His mouth was dry, his tongue like sandpaper. Every nerve in his body was screaming for him to shut the fuck up and, for the love of all that is holy, *proceed* with the actions, but he had to be sure...

“I want you to have me. All of me.” She devilishly cocked an eyebrow and smirked.

With a flick of her wrist, the towel dropped from her body, leaving her body completely bare before him. He saw her naked before, exposed and vulnerable. This was different. This was...an invitation.

She looked at him, her honeyed eyes filled with trust. She would give her body to him, knowing he would cherish her.

If this would be their last night together, Mike would make it count. He would satisfy her a million times over. Fuck sleep, he would sleep

when he's dead.

He gazed over her body, drinking in all of her soft curves. Her body was glorious. He could stare at her forever. But his hands were *itching* to touch and grab and squeeze. He fought against the urge to ravish her immediately; his delicate dancer required finesse.

All of Mike's blood was rushing...south. His jeans started to feel tighter as his erection struggled against the inside of his pants. He groaned, trying to stabilize himself through his arousal.

She moved backwards, never breaking eye contact with him, until her legs hit the edge of the bed. She sat down slowly, spreading her arms out behind her and crossing her legs, waiting for him expectantly.

He moved slowly towards her, his pulse quickening. His heart began to race. She feigned boredom, looking at her nails, then back up at him. She laid down on the bed, flashing him a beautiful view of her ass. She ran her tongue across her lips and fluttered her eyelashes. What a flirt – she was teasing him! Well, two could play at that game...

The animal inside of him wanted to pounce on her, to dominate her and claim her as *his*. But no, he would take this as slow as possible, to prolong the experience. He vowed to worship her like a queen. *His* queen. His empress. His deity.

He stood over her, looking down at her beautiful body as she gazed up at him. He reached out and gently, gingerly, *slowly*, ran his fingers

along her body. His fingertips delicately traced the outline of her hip, her thighs, her breasts... she was breathtaking.

Her breath hitched at the touch, goose bumps covering her delicate flesh. She felt her nipples harden, awakened by arousal. She felt the heat, the tingling wetness, building between her legs. She closed her eyes, letting his gentle touch consume her.

Her breathing deepened. She *needed* him. *Now*.

Jane got up on her knees, kneeling before him at eye-level. She kissed him again, passionately, wrapping her arms around his neck and bringing him down to the bed with her.

Mike obeyed, settling his body against hers on the bed. He dragged his teeth lightly along the skin of her neck, sucking here and there, teasing her, earning soft moans that escaped from her lips.

She craved his touch to soothe the fire that was burning up inside of her. His touch made her body come alive, completely, in a way it never had before. Her skin felt like it was on fire. She would be consumed by her desire.

She ran her hands along his back, his shoulders, through his hair. She felt him pressed against her, enjoying his weight on top of her. She felt his hardness too, driving her crazy.

Mike was harder than he'd ever been. His mind was hazy, lost in the

heavenly feel of her silky smooth skin and the sweet noises she was making. He inhaled her deeply, down to his bones, down to the pit of his soul. His lungs filled with her essence, driving him wild and fueling his insatiable hunger. He couldn't get enough of her. His lips continuously devoured her flesh. Her jaw, down to her neck, down to her shoulder...

Lower and lower, he pressed kisses as soft as whispers. She trembled with anticipation. Her heat was growing, consuming her and pooling between her legs.

His tongue caressed her breasts, lapping over her nipples.

Jane sighed, feeling the maddening ecstasy of his touch. "Mike," she moaned, desperate for him to continue his conquest of her body and go lower, *lower!*, where her body needed him the most.

"Yes?" He asked, still teasing her. His fingertips danced along her waistline, slowly inching down, down...

"Please," she pleaded, completely overflowing with desire.

He could deny her no longer. His fingers made their way down between her legs. Her entrance was slick and hot from arousal, which sent Mike's head spinning.

Oh, how she wanted him.

Her breath hitched at the touch, her hips squirming to meet his fingers in just the right spot. He slid a finger inside of her, encompassed by her wet heat. He slid another finger inside, earning another moan. His fingers moved in and out of her, quicker and quicker, satisfying her hunger.

Bolts of pleasure shot through her body as he found her most sensitive spot. Jane felt like she was flying, through the clouds in the sky, this felt *so fucking good* –

He was a generous lover. "Shhh, let me take you there. I got you."

"Mike..." She moaned, gently, *pleadingly* - the most musical sound Mike had ever heard. The movements of his fingers became sloppy and rough, desperate for her to reach her climax.

"Do you want to come for me?" He pleaded her, trying (and failing) to steady his fingers.

"Yes."

"Come on then." She was close. He could tell.

"Mike...!" Her breaths were getting shallower, more spastic. Her body was paralyzed with pleasure. Beads of sweat had gathered on her forehead.

"Come on!"

"Please..." She was getting desperate. Her internal walls were swollen to accommodate something larger than just his fingers. She reached up and grabbed his arm, stopping him. She met his confused gaze, her eyes darkened with arousal.

"I want you inside of me," she purred. "Please?"

The question hit Mike right in his cock and almost knocked the wind out of him. How the hell could he refuse a request like that?

Oh he was happy to oblige.

He pulled at his clothes, throwing his shirt away. She unzipped his jeans and tugged them down. He scrambled out of them and flung them across the room. Same with his boxers. Now, he was as bare as she was.

He positioned himself over her and looked down at her beautiful body splayed before him. Her skin was flushed and she was panting heavily. Her eyes captured his. She was ready.

He kissed her and took the plunge.

She gasped as he finally sank into her, his girth electrifying all of her internal nerves. Full to the hilt, her hips bucked against his and she moaned again.

“Oh, Mike...”

Fuck, he would never get tired of hearing her moan his name like that. She clung to him as if he were a lifeline, as if she needed him to breathe.

He was buried deep within her. He could feel all of her sweet warmth encompassing his cock. It was fucking ecstasy.

He began to rock his hips, moving in and out in a steady rhythm. She wrapped her legs around him and let their bodies meld together.

His thrusts were long and languid, savoring every inch of her.

"Jane" he whispered, his vision clouding from the stimulation. “Oh my God, you feel so good.”

“More,” she demanded greedily. Her brain was swimming with pleasure. Her nails dug into the skin on his back, clutching him firmly. “Give me more!”

The beast inside of him finally broke loose. He grabbed her hips roughly and pulled her towards him as he thrust into her. She opened

her legs wider, making more room for him, allowing him to go deeper. He began thrusting madly, pounding her harder, pushing her to the brink of orgasm. Her grip tightened on him as he was giving her more of that beautiful friction.

Until...

Until...

Until...!

Oh God...!

Jane clenched her legs together in sweet release and ocean waves of pleasure crashed over her body.

Her orgasm pushed Mike over the edge as he finally came. His thrusts halted as he moaned. He was panting, his energy completely spent.

She was breathing heavy too, recuperating from the intensity of her climax. They stared into each other's eyes, their frantic heartbeats slowing down, blood pumping in their ears.

Trembling slightly, she gently brushed the sweaty hair from his forehead and kissed him.

Finally satiated, their fire slowly burnt out.

He rolled over onto his back and pulled her with him. He pressed a

sweet kiss to her forehead and she laid her head down on his sweaty chest. His scent enveloped her as she drifted away and her eyelids fluttered closed. Before sleep took her, a thought floated through her mind, a single word that made her sleep with a smile on her lips -

...Soulmate.

He lay on the bed, holding her in his arms and feeling her warmth. His heart felt like it would burst. This was it – he could happily die right now.

He heard her breathing slow as she fell asleep. Although he was tired, Mike wouldn't let himself fall asleep. This was their last night together, he wanted to remember it. He tightened his arms around her, desperate to never let go.

But in the morning, he would have to let go. He didn't want to leave her alone, but he had no choice. His life was a mess.

He was suspended from school.

His parents were royally pissed at him.

He would be grounded until he was 35.

He had to leave Jane...

A single tear ran down his cheek.

What the hell was he going to do now?

Notes for the Chapter:

Well? WELL?!?! I'd LOVE to hear what you think!!

I almost didn't include that bit of angst at the end, but I kind of felt like it was necessary to balance the chapter a bit. We're plunging into angst-territory next, unfortunately. But I hope you'll stick around! :D